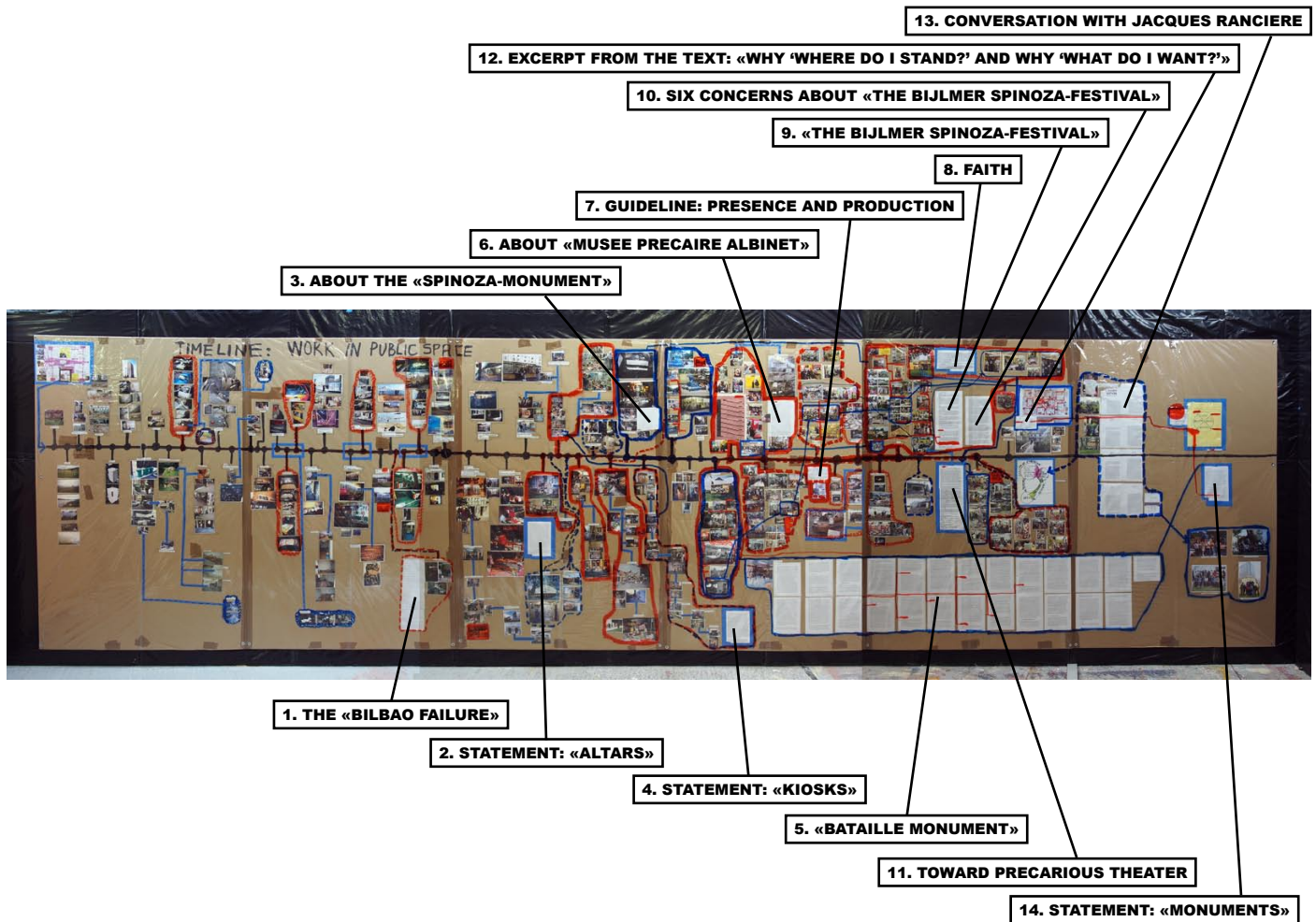


**THOMAS HIRSCHHORN**  
**«TIMELINE: WORK IN PUBLIC SPACE», 2012**  
**THE 14 INCLUDED TEXTS**



## The “Bilbao Failure”

I want to talk about my experience during my time at Bilbao. I did three things in Bilbao: first, the “Bilbao Catalogue”; second, the work during my stay in Bilbao; third, the *W.U.E*, the *World-Understanding-Engine*.<sup>1</sup> Here I only want to talk about my work during my stay. I asked that during the three weeks that I be able to occupy a premise with a window on the street level and that I be able to work there. I wanted to show people in Bilbao that I was there, that I was working, that I had nothing to hide, that there was no secret. I also wanted, precisely, to not work in relation to this city or to its political and economic situation, because to me it's demagogic to come for a few days and develop a work that takes into consideration the givens of the area. Works like that can only be superficial. So I set myself up in an old haberdashery on a rather well-off street with other businesses. The area had the advantage of being near the Institut Français and also the Salle Rekalde 1 [contemporary art space]. I thought that the fact of removing the window separating the store from the street would allow passersby to establish a visual dialogue. I wanted my approach to be understood only through looking. The approach of an outsider who has come to work among them. Transparently, available, curious.

I quickly understood that this could not work. I understood it would be a failure. I understood that there were three unresolved problems that did not allow this project to achieve a conclusive result. A question is immediately raised about my desire to be “transparent,” close to people, to not want to intimidate but rather to exhibit, show the process, and therefore the doubt, the hesitation. I think it's a mistake to want that. Even though I respect my willingness to show weakness, I have to fight against it with all my might. You have to fight against it because the viewer cannot understand that willingness because there is no distance between my willingness and its result. So there's a hesitation, there's awkwardness. I'm neither an exhibitionist nor a masochist. I think I was lacking utopian lucidity about this first problem, that I made the mistake of being a “native” and you don't get anywhere by staying “native.” The other problem is a problem regarding the structure of this intervention. Obviously, it's connected to the first point. But from the moment I felt my project couldn't work, I didn't make the effort to stir up people. I find this artistically and intellectually honest, but it contributed to the failure. For, I'm sure of it, if the effort to communicate were made, my project could have been understood. I mean by including information panels, by approaching people, by circulating information in the street, I could have better circulated my intention. Clearly it's not what I wanted, because I wanted visual dialogue, not a dialogue-explanation. I

was conscious that this project could only be achieved by explaining my intention to people, yet I precisely wanted them to see without my explanation, without my help. So it was impossible to change and, at the same time, impossible to “win.” I therefore continued and that was the only satisfaction I got from it. I didn’t give up, I worked well, I understood, I completed it. The third question is a technical problem. A store with a window is indeed not the street. The window, the pane, the entrance door are to be crossed with the “gaze” or by entering into the store. There’s still a very significant line between the passerby’s passivity and activity. I removed that line by removing the window and by installing neons that made it so that the studio was occupied twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. (A mesh curtain was drawn only at night, and even when I wasn’t there, there was a video screen that showed me working). So, by removing that essential boundary, I did something that no longer has a code, which cannot be read. Passersby immediately grasped, in a blink of the eye, the non-accessibility, the incommunicability, of my proposition. I assaulted them as much as I found myself being assaulted. It was a non-dialogue. I made the mistake of not establishing that artificial boundary between them and my work. That distance allows one to become active or to remain passive. The only people, and this is moral evidence, that entered into active contact with me were artists (who knew about project), the mentally ill, alcoholics, and drug addicts asking for money), foreigners (non-Basques, non-Spanish) wanting to talk!

1996

[Translated from French by Molly Stevens.]

## STATEMENT : « Altars »

An altar is a personal, artistic commitment. I want to fix my heroes. The altars want to give memory of someone who is dead and who was loved by somebody else. It is important to testify ones' love, ones' attachment. The heroes can't change, but the altars' location can change. The altars could have been made in other cities, countries. The altars could be done in different locations: on a street, on a side way, in a corner. These very local sites of memory become very universal sites of memory, by virtue of their location. That is what interests me. I choose locations that are not in the center or in strategic point of a city, just any place. In the same way as people can die anywhere. Most people don't die in the middle of a square or on a beautiful boulevard; their deaths rarely happen in a strategic location, even famous people don't die in « the center ». There is no hierarchy of location between anonymous and famous people. There are unexpected locations. The location is important not in relationship to the layout of the city, but in relation to the people who died. This gives me the plan for locating the altars. These altars are questioning the status of a monument today by their form, by their location, and by their duration. Thus, the choice of location is determining for my statement on work in public space and my critique of monuments. The form of these four altars comes from spontaneous altars, that one sees here or there, made by those who wish to give a precarious homage to someone deceased on the spot, by accident, suicide, murder or heart attack (Gianni Versace, J.F. Kennedy Jr., Olaf Palme). The forms of these homages are alike, whether made for celebrities or made for the unknown: candles, flowers, often wrapped in transparent paper, teddy bears and stuffed animals, written messages on scraps of paper with hearts and other love symbols. With this wild mixture of forms, the messages of love and attachment to the deceased person are expressed without any aesthetic concern; it is this personal commitment that interests me. It comes from the heart. It is pure energy. One is not preoccupied with the form-quality of the elements, but only with the message that is to be conveyed. The reason why I have chosen artists that I love for their work and for their lives is: no cynicism, only commitment. The forms of these altars, that are profane and not religious, convey a visual form based on weakness. The forms and locations of the altars show the precarious aspect of the work. It is because of necessity and urgency that they are there. The cruelty and the non-spectacular of these monuments makes them untouchable by people walking by, proprietors, street-cleaners, dog-walkers, policemen. Everyone could be concerned. Everyone is concerned. These altars will disappear sooner or later. The average duration of the altars is of two weeks. The disappearance of the altar is as important as its presence. The memory of what is important doesn't need a monument.

I have made four altars for four artists and writers : Piet Mondrian, Otto Freundlich, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Raymond Carver. The Piet Mondrian altar was shown in Geneva in 1997; the Otto Freundlich altar was shown in 1998 in Basel and Berlin; the Ingeborg Bachmann altar was shown in 1998 in Zürich and in Halle Tyrol in 1999 and in Berlin, in the subway in 2006 (U2-Alexanderplatz, curator: NGBK); and the Raymond Carver altar was shown in 1998 in Fribourg, in Philadelphia (curator: The Galleries at Moore) and Glasgow (" Vivre sa vie" groupshow) in 2000, and in 2002 near the South Public Library in Miami.

T.H. February 2006

## Project « Denkmal-Spinoza »

I want to make a Denkmal (memorial / monument) at the Amsterdam St. Annenstraat quartier for the exhibition « Midnight Walkers & City Sleepers ». It is a non-permanent monument, about 5 meters long, 2,5 meters wide and 3 meters high ! It is a resolute 24 hour public monument. It will be placed in a non-strategic, non-disturbing place, in a not-special monument site, for exemple on a parking place for cars. Somewhere on the side, as garbage is placed in the morning before pick-up.

I have in mind, from memory from my trip to Amsterdam, a space along one, of the Graacht near and beside the prostitute's windows. But we have to decide the final emplacement together on the spot. The Monument will be made of cardboard covered with grey plastic, the base shaped like a rock emerging from water. On one side a human statue stands holding a book in one hand. It is Spinoza.

Integrated in the base of the monument there will be a video and some copies of parts of Spinoza's book « Ethics ». The size of the statue will be a bit larger than human size, circa 2,5 meters. His name will be written out in cut-out letters. There will be two different flags that can represent passion and reason. Some flowers can also be there on the ground ring about, as when a monument is reactualized on some yearly occasion. All around the monument there shall be a bench, as protection, and to accentuate the sculptural power and precarious aspect of the Denkmal. Like the impression of an appartement burned down with the belongings scattered on the sidewalk beneath.

A neonlight will be installed on the top of the monument to illuminate the sculpture like a streelight, day and night. The electricity will be provided for the lamp and the TV-monitor by some red-window-prostitute place near by. To accentuate connexion and dependance.

I chose Spinoza for Amsterdam (as the first of a series of « Denkmals » that I will do with Deleuze, Bataille and **greg.org** elsewhere). Spinoza, born in Amstedom, I like his purity strength, and non-moralist thoughts. I like the organisation of thinking in propositions, demonstrations, corallaire, colie in « Ethics ». I like his logic. I like the strongsense of human existence and how human can think, that I feel when reading his work. It is a full-time thinking. This is the relation, with, of course, the birth place of Spinoza in Amsterdam, to the St. Annenstraat quartier : 24 hours sex and money.

T.H. April 1999

## STATEMENT : « Kiosks »

This « Kunst am Bau Projekt » was intended for the new building for the brain research and molecular-biology research department of the University of Zürich. The work is a « work in progress » made for the entrance hall of this department. This hall is a public space although mostly frequented by students, professors and laboratory technicians. The project is to build eight kiosks within four years, a new kiosk every half year. The kiosk is set up each time in a different location of the entrance hall, which is designed in a specifically neutral and functional way, as the architecture of the whole building. The kiosk is installed in this interior hall like a compact cell, an independent implant in the existing space, like an airport kiosk, train station or hospital kiosk that sell newspapers, cigarettes and candy. I want to show its' integrated presence in a building. Whether used or not, it just stands there, present. Thus, this kiosk is important as a mobile object, that stands out from the existing surroundings by its' handmade, quickly made form. It is in contrast with the top quality architecture, with the top technicity and functionality. With this voluntary contrast, I wanted to propose an outlook towards a different reality. This reality can liberate new or unknown energies. I want to confront the reality of this institution ; biologists, technicians, researchers, with the reality of other researchers in other fields, artists, writers. They too are committed in their research. They too make researches. The small size of the kiosk is made to receive one spectator so that he can isolate himself and concentrate on the informations given within the kiosk, for one minute, for one hour, or for a whole day long. The kiosk is built with a wooden structure covered by cardboard and lit with neon lights. On the top, outside, there is a sign with the name of the artist or the writer. Inside, all the available books of and about the artist or writer and video tapes are displayed to be consulted by the public. The inner walls are covered with photocopies of texts on his or her life, images, writings, and other documentary elements. Everything about the kiosk is made so that the person is plunged into a totally different world. The world of Robert Walser for example. I want the visitor to discover or complete his knowledge about the artists' work. I want to cut a window towards another existence. The presence of a work of art within this scientific-work world wants to question the fact of being committed and engaged with a human activity and with the precarity of this activity. This work in progress project, through its' rhythm of rotations, and by its' time limited form, is a statement about art commitment in public space. The fact that the project lasts four years, makes it long enough to give awareness and memory and it is not long enough to create habit and lassitude. Too often « Kunst am Bau Projekte » and work in public space create habit and lassitude. I want people to continue without kiosks to be interested in artists and writers. This work is video-documented with interventions of the spectators and users of the kiosks during four years. This documentation will become an important element of the project.

The kiosk project is a commissioned project, resulting from a competition organized by the University of Zürich. It will run from 1999 to 2002. The kiosks are made for : Robert Walser, Otto Freundlich, Ingeborg Bachmann, Emmanuel Bove, Meret Oppenheim, Fernand Léger, Emil Nolde and Ljov Popova.

T.H. February 2000

# Bataille Monument, Thomas Hirschhorn

## 1. Preparations for the Bataille Monument in Paris and in Kassel

From my experience with projects in public space—and so far I have worked on 43 projects, both large and small—I know that the preparation phase is extraordinarily important. For this project two aspects had to be prepared at the same time. On the one hand was preparation on the ground in Kassel, which encompassed the selection of a site for the project, looking for potential partners, grants, on-site organization, and generally getting to know the city of Kassel. On the other hand was preparation in Paris, including the substantive discussion on Georges Bataille, the people who did the workshops, preparing the “software”, that is, materials needed independent of site selection and other local aspects. I tried to use the time available as extensively as possible. Together with Okwui [Artistic director Okwui Enwezor of Nigeria] I set the basic features of the project early on: It would be a project in public space, as part of the “monuments” series; it was about Georges Bataille, as third in a total of four philosophers, that had been previously selected. Owing to the experience I had had up to then with the monuments, I wanted to further develop the Bataille Monument. That is why, even before I visited Kassel for the first time, I had already decided in November 2000 that I wanted to make a monument with a number of elements. I wanted to make it right where people live. In other words, in a housing complex. I wanted to do it with the residents; especially because of what I learned from the Deleuze Monument, I wanted to supervise and follow the project myself for the duration of the exhibition. I also wanted to be there when it was dismantled. That much had been discussed with Okwui and was clear in my head. All in all I made ten short trips to Kassel in the period from November 2000 to April 2002. I knew I wanted to devote as much personal energy as possible to this project; that is, to travel there without any assistants. That is always difficult, since different laws prevail in public space than in a museum or gallery. So it was imperative, for example, to be able to speak the language spoken at the site. Through an acquaintance I contacted Robin Dannenberg, a social worker in Kassel, who was supposed to help out in the various phases of the project. More important for me than his qualifications as a social worker was the fact that he knew the city very well and could help me clarify the site issue during the preparation phase. I knew that the site question was extremely important, and that precisely because it is so decisive, it can only be resolved instinctively, in a kind of emergency situation. This is because, although I spent all in all more than two months in Kassel, I don't really know the city, so I needed information from residents, acquaintances, informational material from the city, and of course by visiting the locations that were being considered. Because I wanted it to be possible to mentally transplant the location to another district in the city or another city or another country, the site had to allow for that. The selected site thus had to inherently possess this element of asserting its ability to be transplanted. And yet it also had to be a place that satisfied the criteria I introduced earlier. Only instinct can help in such a case! The most important thing in selecting a location in Kassel was the potential helpers, the residents, the supporting contact people. And insofar, getting to know Lothar Kannenberg, the independent initiator of the Philippinenhof Boxing Camp was of prime importance. After visiting and talking with him and the young people he boxes with on several occasions, I was certain that the Philippinenhof Boxing Camp and the charismatic and exemplary position of Lothar Kannenberg had to be an important fixed point for my project in the housing complex. It was up to me to convince him and the youngsters of the seriousness of my project. I succeeded in doing that, for one thing, because I admire him. For the fight that he is fighting with himself. He has become a true friend. The dynamics of the boxing camp was therefore one of many deciding factors in selecting a site, and getting to know Lothar Kannenberg was important for the project. This alone explains the long preparation phase.

Preparations in Paris, including working with Christophe Fiat, who explained the work of Georges Bataille to me from his own personal slant and in context, was quite an enrichment for me. In dialogue with Christophe, I explored the work of Georges Bataille. This was new for him as well as

for me. He explained Georges Bataille to me. I encouraged him to map out Bataille's work for me visually. Together with Christophe I made four trips to stations in Georges Bataille's life. This was one of the best parts of the work on Georges Bataille. The four trips were to St. German en Laye, Veslay, Lacoste, and the caves of Lascaux. As short as they were, these trips were an important step toward understanding the work of Georges Bataille as well as demanding to deal with it freely. Christophe Fiat always made succinct, precise statements that helped me understand the contexts in the life and work of Georges Bataille. These trips had a significance that went beyond the status of implementing the Bataille Monument. They were moments of insight.

## 2. Construction

It took two months to set up the Bataille Monument. There were between 20 and 30 young people and other residents of the housing complex working on it. My project was to seek no experts, art students or other art connoisseurs to help build it. Instead, I wanted to build my project together with the residents. It was no problem to find young people and other residents wanting to work on the project. The incentive was the 8 € that I paid as an hourly wage. I will come back to the problem regarding payment later on. For me, one thing that was certain was that everyone would be paid for his or her work. I hate volunteerism for the sake of art! I refuse to appeal to volunteers, that is, unpaid workers, in order to implement my work of art.

Constructing the Bataille Monument was the hardest project I ever created. I went beyond my limits; I was worn out. I really had to activate strength that I did not have. The construction was greatly overtaxing, in terms of technical efforts, organization, group dynamics. It was one big mess-up. I never had as many doubts about the Bataille Monument as I did during the set-up phase. I wanted to create my project with young people and residents from the housing complex; I did not want to exclude anyone. No one and never! I said, "If you live here, you can work on the project!" The group that came together was very diverse, with respect to age, cultural and social background, attitude toward work. When despite all the problems we made it through the first week, I went home—I had moved into an apartment in the complex—to discover that my apartment had been broken into and my personal hi-fi, photography and video equipment had been stolen. I knew that it was one of us and I knew that the continuation of the project was thus uncertain. I had serious doubts about my project. I knew that I would have to provoke a solution since this was a test of my project's contact with reality. In other words, was my project too out of touch with reality? I also had to take responsibility for what happened. I didn't have any choice. Either this was a test that I would pass, or it would be the end of my project. I could pass the test only if I got back all of the stolen property without having to look for the culprit or culprits and without calling in the police. I passed the test. I was only able to pass it because I always focussed on my art project. I knew when everything was returned that my project was difficult and complex, but it was not out of touch with reality. I had doubted my work, but it helped me eliminate all other choices. It put me in an emergency situation in order to make the right decision. I was doing the project because at that moment I was confronted with the fundamental question that was posed: What do I want? I could not answer this question hypothetically. I had to be active; I had to act and use a certain degree of authority and also force. I had to counter theory with practice. This experience and the happy outcome to this test strengthened me in my goal of not wanting to exclude anyone from working on the project. Despite pressure from the group of workers toward the suspected thieves, I thought if art is not capable of resisting this normative pressure of exclusion, then nothing and no one will be able to!

The construction with the daily, not irresolvable but often simultaneously appearing problems was an act of strength in which I had a hard time assessing the extent to which it was an act of strength because I, Thomas Hirschhorn, was the initiator, the organizer, the employer. Paying attention only to the time, I too often lost contact with the experience of building it together. I think it is also impossible for me to say with certainty that it is possible to do it any other way, that it can be done

differently! One thing that I *can* say certainly occurred and which is not a new, that is, unknown, phenomenon for me is satellite formation. A negative experience that I have had more than once, which I also could not prevent on this project, is that of isolating myself, of cutting myself off from the group project of Documenta 11. Despite the excellent starting conditions, and by that I mean the relationship to the Documenta 11 team, I was not able to avoid all conflicts. Not that I was afraid of conflict or that I tried to avoid it, but Platform 5 is a group exhibition. On the one hand there were objective reasons for this satellite formation: the geographical distance between my project and the main venues of the exhibition, the increasing stress as opening date approached, and the growing, clear-cut hierarchies that were forming, which had a negative effect as regards technical help since we were further away. But I also think I myself participated in creating a conflict and building up negative energy, since I don't resist this urge to be a lone fighter. It is not the first time this happened and I think it is absolutely unnecessary, especially since I was not agitating myself only, but this time it also involved the people working with me. From the set-up phase I remember the wonderful answer that Marco, one of the workers, gave to a passer-by who asked, "Is that supposed to be art?". He responded, "Yes, because we did it together!" In spite of everything, construction was completed on June 5th, 2002, right on schedule, and all the elements of the Bataille Monument were finished!

### 3. Opening of the Bataille Monument

The opening of the Bataille Monument, like the rest of the Documenta 11 exhibition, took place over the course of three days. I decided that we would celebrate it in the housing complex for three days. Every day, that is, on the 6th, 7th, and 8th of June there were free drinks and food at the snack bar starting at 6 p.m. On the one hand, I wanted to thank the residents of the complex, who accepted the project in spite of the noise and the space we used. On the other hand, I wanted to have our own opening celebration here in the housing complex. This went well, although the Kaban family, who ran the snack bar, was totally overrun by the storm of kids. Most importantly, the opening celebration in the complex served to create a mixed audience. Though I must admit that I organized that deliberately. I had assumed that the visitors who came to the opening of the Documenta 11 would not correspond to the regular visitors, so that on these three days the invitation to the locals encouraged a directed mixing of residents and Documenta 11 visitors took place. I was surprised at how many Documenta 11 visitors came to the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex. Although it definitely took a lot of time and the program schedule was very full, I noticed the seriousness and genuine curiosity of many visitors. Was that the Documenta mythos? That is why I was also surprised at how fast many people voiced opinions of my work—already on the first evening! I posted a quotation by David Hammons on the freestanding panels set up at the two shuttle stops, in the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex and in front of the entrance to the Binding Brewery: "The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, its conservative, it's out to criticize, not to understand and it never has any fun. Why should I spend my time playing to that audience? That's like going into a lion's den. So I refuse to deal with that audience, and I'll play with the street audience. That audience is much more human and their opinion is from the heart. They don't have any reason to play games; there's nothing gained or lost." I read this quotation in London in the "Protest and Survive" exhibition that I participated in. This quote is both problematic and contradictory, but it strikes the core of the complexity of work in public space and the audience of public space. David Hammons is part of the art world and his work is part of the art market. Nonetheless, these sentences also defiantly assert the autonomy of a work of art. I wanted to honor that and at the same time propose it as an appeal for reflection and as a link between the two stops of the "shuttle service". It is also an homage to the artist David Hammons, whose work I value very much. What I see in this quote that applies entirely for my Bataille Monument project is that it also has nothing to win or lose. Work in public space can be neither a success nor a failure. Instead, it is about the experience, about exposing oneself, about enduring and working out an experience. A project in public space is never a total success or a total failure. I think working in public space does not need these

criteria. Am I capable of making contact with people? Am I capable of creating events? Am I acting in earnest?

Right on opening day I realized that earlier—during planning, preparations, and set-up—I had never thought the Bataille Monument could be discussed and criticized as a social art project. I think it is totally proper if social issues are raised through an art project. It is the question as to the surroundings, the environment, the world in its broadest sense. That is a goal of my work. I am not afraid of false interpretations or over-interpretations or misunderstandings. But one thing was and has always been clear for me: I am an artist and not a social worker. My project is an art project that aims to assert its autonomy as an art project! This was the starting point and cornerstone of all the discussions I had with the people working on the project as well as with the visitors. Precisely because the Bataille Monument is an art project it is possible to refuse to exclude anyone from working on it; and because the Bataille Monument is an art project it is also imperative that it not be influenced by wishes of the residents as regards content. The guideline was: “As the artist I am not helping you; I don’t want to help you or ask you how I can help. Instead, as the artist I am asking, can you and do you want to help me complete my project?” I think this was acknowledged and accepted by the residents and the workers. I wanted to make it clear to the residents of the housing complex why I wanted to create my work of art right there with them. I wanted to create my work of art in a housing complex that is itself a piece of reality. Without illusions; without phantasms. I wanted to act; I wanted to act with and through art. Hope not as dream or escape. Hope as discussion and confrontation, hope as the principle of taking action. You take action only because you have hope. And if the Bataille Monument is supposed to be set up, supervised, and taken down, together with the artist, what is more natural, more logical, than asking the residents for help? Why should this project be set up and supervised by specialists if there are enough people in this housing complex who are available to do the work? What is the more obvious choice and more understandable? And what makes more sense than to say: “The assistance by especially talented, fast, or specialized technicians is not needed; assistance by the residents is needed!” For the simple reason that the project is being done here! To that extent the workers were never “materials”. Instead, I could not complete my project on my own and that is why I posed the question and demand: “Don’t do it my way! Let’s do it together!”

#### 4.a. Shuttle service

I wanted the shuttle service to be an element of the Bataille Monument and not a separate service. The shuttle service was to create an actual link to go from the housing complex to the Binding Brewery and vice versa. It was a kind of taxi that shuttled at no charge between the Bataille Monument and the other parts of platform 5 of the Documenta 11. The shuttle service was also intended as a means of regulating the flow of visitors. I did not want visitors to come to the Bataille Monument by the busload or in tourist vans; I wanted them to come in small groups. A maximum of four people fit in our Mercedes-Benz. I thought it would facilitate personal conversations and would protect the housing complex from large groups of art tourists. In fact, I think it is only possible to confront art on an individual basis. Groups of art tourists could of course not be totally avoided, but at least it was left up to the initiative of the respective groups and nothing was done to encourage them. Five drivers were specially trained and the shuttle service was one element that completed its task of transporting people and engaging in conversation during the drive. The drivers themselves contributed to making the visit to the Bataille Monument a real event for many visitors. At first I intended to use four vehicles, but that proved impossible for financial reasons, so we used two cars that were usually used to capacity. It was unavoidable that lines developed at the shuttle stop at the Binding Brewery. This was not very satisfying. It got especially bad toward the end of the exhibition period. I had to admit that even my project led to lines developing, making it necessary to wait in line. This is one thing I criticize about exhibition operations. Four cars would have reduced but not totally prevented these lines, in view of the fact that often one of the cars was being repaired. The shuttle service did turn out to be an expensive element of the

Bataille Monument, since besides purchasing and maintaining the cars, buying gas, and of course the hourly wages of the drivers, the two cars were in the garage more than ten times in all. This could have been attributed to the fact that we bought used cars or to the different driving styles of the drivers. Also, the repairs were often done unsatisfactorily or incompetently, which was my responsibility, since I always simply wanted the cars to be back on the road as fast as possible, no matter who did the repairs and how much it cost. There were no accidents, which is evidence of the seriousness and commitment with which the drivers carried out their mission.

#### 4.b. “Georges Bataille” Library

The “Georges Bataille” Library was intended to facilitate connections based on the work of Georges Bataille. For this reason there were no books in the library by or about Georges Bataille. Instead, there were books on five subjects: Word, image, art, sports, and sex. These “force fields” of the work of Bataille were supposed to expand and develop. Uwe Fleckner, who proposed these categories and selected most of the books and cassettes, put together the list of books in an extremely precise and subjective manner. I am very pleased that he insisted on his selection uncompromisingly and without trying to curry favor with anyone. However, I must admit that at first I was surprised at the relatively small number of books. There were a total of 700 books and cassettes. I think I was surprised because we had set up too many book stands and when the books were all placed on the shelves it looked rather empty. This was difficult to stand in the beginning but it was good to have resisted the urge to want to fill the shelves. Also, I had underestimated the list of books compiled by Uwe Fleckner and I am happy that we did not only post it but we also laid out photocopies of the list. Very many visitors took a copy with them. I do not regard that as positive in itself because it could also have had to do with the consumer urge to want to take something with you. But the book list was not only form, it is also program and can make sense even separate from the library. The “library” space with chairs, sofas, and armchairs was a room and a meeting place for the young people from the housing complex. In a realistic and modest appraisal, this led in isolated cases to residents of the complex borrowing books. I recall Elfriede, who borrowed and read all the books by Marquis de Sade, not having previously known this author. The greatest demand was for the video cassettes. What impressed me regarding the pornographic videos was that no one said anything moralizing about them to me. Aside from the initial discussions about the overboard success of these videos and the fact that it could not be guaranteed that no young people under 18 would also watch them, the subject of “sex” in the library seemed to regulate itself insofar as within a few days all that was left in the library of the pornographic videos were the empty cases. The library was an open space where visitors and residents, especially the young people, could meet. I noted that it was important, on the one hand, that this room belong to the young people (since they live here), but a balance should also exist, such that it was a library that functioned as a library, where people could calmly borrow, browse through, or read a book. I had many different experiences in and around the library. I liked it when the residents said, “I’m going to the library,” or “Let’s meet in the library.”

#### 4.c. Bataille exhibition

The aim of the “Bataille exhibition” was to convey information and knowledge about the life and work of Georges Bataille. Four parts of the exhibition were devoted to this goal. The topography in the center of the room showed two superimposed maps: the diagram of Georges Bataille’s work and the relief map of the city of Kassel. The books of Georges Bataille were placed there to represent the buildings; that is, the works were the structures. With four integrated videos and the video on the “Papuan” I wanted to depict the movement, the dynamic forces in the life of Georges Bataille, as well as what I considered his incredible topical relevance. I made sure that the videos were constantly running and that the sound of the each one was always understandable. Especially after initial misunderstandings about the use and purpose of the video equipment, this ultimately worked well, which I feel is very important, since there is nothing more trying than

non-functioning videos in exhibitions. I am pleased that we managed to keep them going in the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex to the very end. The third part of the exhibition were the freestanding panels. The materials on them were supposed to shed light on essential points in the work of Bataille. Here there was too much information that was only in French. I paid too little attention during the planning phase in Paris to make sure enough written materials in German were selected for the freestanding panels. Criticism that was expressed in this regard was totally justified. Finally, the fourth and most important part of the exhibition were the books by and about Georges Bataille. I tried to have all books in German, English, French, and Turkish available to look through. I think there was too little space to do this. The exhibition room was too small, so the books were not easily accessible. There was no real seating available which made it inconvenient to look through the books. The books were there but their presentation was hardly more than symbolic. There was physical space but no mental space available for the works of Bataille. I also think the role played by the respective workers at the exhibition was not sufficiently defined. They were the only ones involved in the Bataille Monument who had only a passive role. It was not possible for them to become actively involved; just like in a museum, they only paid attention to what was going on around them. That it what made it nice at least that the children from the housing complex often sat down on the sofa when their older friends were there working as attendants. One thing I liked about the exhibition as well as the other sections (library, TV studio) were the writing, graffiti, and drawings that covered up more and more of the empty spaces on the panels over the course of the exhibition. That form of appropriation is beautiful in the way it gets increasingly dense and takes over the panels. This was not planned or intended. While some of these added content and statements that could then be discussed, they were also a *formal* enrichment. At the same time it brought greater complexity of content to the Bataille Monument.

#### 4.d. Snack bar

I gained considerable experience from my previous project, the Deleuze Monument. For example, in discussion with the residents the suggestion was made to have a beverage stand or a place to sit with refreshments outside of the actual monument. In planning the Bataille Monument I was thinking from the outset of having a snack bar—not outside of the monument, but as an equivalent element of the monument, integrated into it. The idea of “snack bar” is not, or not primarily, about offering food and drinks, but about offering an opportunity to talk, converse, spend time. At the same time the snack bar was a further anchor for the housing complex and the residents. For me it was clear that the snack bar would be run by residents of the housing complex. The snack bar is a door, a way into the monument, and simultaneously it is part of the monument. People often meet at monuments in cities to have something to drink and to talk. I also hoped the snack bar would exist for and be used by the Documenta 11 visitors as well as the residents. This was the case especially in the evenings. I thought it was nice that at 10 in the evening, when the monument and the snack bar “closed”, the last guests to leave were usually from the housing complex. It was also nice that some people went to the snack bar almost every day, although they did not visit the other elements of the monument.

I always assumed that whoever drank a beer or ate a döner kebab at the snack bar would also use the rest of the monument. At first it was difficult to find someone to run the snack bar because those who expressed interest were afraid of the financial risk. My conditions were that there would be no rental fee for the stand and no water or electricity bills. The operators could keep all the money taken in by the snack bar. But they had to buy all the food and beverages and, most important, the snack bar had to be open twelve hours a day, every day of the week, just like the other elements of the monument. At first this scared the potential operators. In the end a solution was found, as was often the case in the complex, by having a discussion with the residents. The Kaban family decided to run the snack bar. The commitment and realism of this family played a major role in making the snack bar a meeting place and a place to converse. The friendliness and availability of the Kaban family (mother, father, two sons, grandmother, uncle, and aunt)

often stood out. They operated the snack bar with Turkish and German refreshments absolutely independently. I was happy that they took on this task seriously. Every evening they cleaned up until 11 p.m. and prepared for the next day, when they reopened at 10 a.m. Although it didn't really matter to me, and the Kaban family also expressed no need for an exchange, I do not think the family had reason to regret the risk they took, financial or otherwise. On that I would like to say that I had not considered any additional shared systems of distributing risk and profits. But through this experience it could seriously be considered as a future option, as that would have increased participation by the housing complex.

#### 4.e. TV studio

The aim of the "TV studio" was to create TV reports, approximately 10-minutes in length, from the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex and to broadcast them in the "open channel" of the city of Kassel. These TV reports would be produced and edited by the young people and other residents and workers on the ground, and then transmitted to the "open channel." The programs had to have something to do with Georges Bataille. They were supposed to report on the housing complex, its residents, a worker or a visitor to the Bataille Monument. We did not do any reports in the city. All programs were to be local, from the housing complex and about the complex and events happening here directly. I was very happy to see the accumulation of video cassettes and I am pleased that we were able to broadcast a new cassette every production day, that is, on 72 days (excluding Saturdays and Sundays). There were some very good reports, such as those in which the young people took advantage of the chance to talk about themselves, their problems, their views. And those of readings by Christophe Fiat, Jean-Charles Masséra, Manuel Joseph, Uwe Fleckner, and Marcus Steinweg. Not all of the reports expressed the same intensity, necessity, and urgency, but they all attempted to be based on the reality around us. Some of the reports were not discussed and assessed sufficiently in advance. Consequently, some of them, especially the interviews with visitors to the Bataille Monument, were lacking vibrancy and involvement. Sometimes we chose the easiest and fastest solution in order to expend the least amount of effort. This criticism, or self-criticism, does not only apply to the TV studio. I often no longer had sufficient energy; often the necessary energy was lacking to tackle more difficult subjects. Sometimes I was content with the absolute minimum, that is, the daily production of a cassette. Maybe the "TV studio," the most sophisticated element of the monument in terms of technology and organization, was lacking some assistance that would have served as a link between me and the residents who produced the reports. The Austrian Institute for Culture organized a seminar event for the first evening (June 6<sup>th</sup>). The somewhat artificial circumstances alone—that is, the fact that it was opening night and organized as an official event—already gave us an indication of the particular complexity and problems of the Bataille Monument. Over time the "TV studio" became an active meeting place owing to its geographic location in the housing complex, the proximity to the residents, and the Monument workers. For example, I recall the evenings with Reinhold and his wife Gudrun and friends, sitting in front of the TV studio. These situations made the TV studio into a pillar of the Bataille Monument, open to both visitors and residents alike, though the Documenta 11 visitors sat *inside*, in the TV studio, and the residents sat *outside*, in front of the studio!

#### 4.f. The Workshops

My motivation for the workshops was that I wanted the Bataille Monument to be lasting, that is, I wanted small events radiating out sporadically from the Bataille Monument to be held during the exhibition in the Friedrich-Wöhler housing complex. Something was to be created, produced—here and now—that had some relationship to Georges Bataille. My experience with the workshops was divided. On the one hand, the workshops I organized ahead of time—the workshops of Jean-Charles Massera, Manuel Joseph, and Marcus Steinweg—were wonderful and (I will come back to them later) and truly enriching, an output, evidence of the claim that the Bataille Monument can

produce something. On the other hand, I had imagined there would be many more workshops, such as a housing complex run, a boxing event, small concerts with the residents, a capoeira-dance event, a conversation with the person working for the city of Kassel in charge of Joseph Beuys's Documenta VII "7000 Oaks" project. None of these workshops took place. This had to do with the lack of energy; I simply could not muster enough energy to organize the workshops. I was so busy with all the daily tasks of supervising and maintaining the Bataille Monument that there was no energy left over to organize and carry out workshops. I underestimated that without preparation or organizational assistance there were limits to my energy. The only workshop that took place that was not planned in advance was the Alternative Construction Trailer that docked onto the Bataille Monument for a week. After initial reservations by the building superintendent, the house management, and some residents, it was integrated very well. Here, too, I was surprised at the tolerance shown by a majority of the residents with respect to this non-approved action that was inspired only because of the Bataille Monument. The housing complex supported the construction trailer exhibition as well. The two debates by Jean-Charles Massera, who worked with the young people to perform texts he had written, led in the very beginning to intense and sophisticated discussion. Jean-Charles's understanding, humor, and ambition created a basis for group work that was important for the continued cohesion and for the seriousness of our project. The ten forged letters "Sculpture as a Bullfight" by Manuel Joseph and his goal of bringing them to the citizens of Kassel by distributing them throughout the city was wonderful. Thanks to the HNA daily newspaper, almost 10,000 copies of a letter was placed in mailboxes of Kassel households; this was repeated for each of the letters in ten different districts of the city. It was an important productive part of the Bataille Monument that Manuel Joseph thus spread poetry in a very concrete way, not with a goal in mind or aiming for a response. On the freestanding panel set up in the TV studio, where all of Manuel's letters were hung in German and translated into English and French, it was possible to follow the development of this workshop. I was happy that in the end all ten letters with translations filled the board. The workshop by Marcus Steinweg, his idea of text output, his understanding of the Bataille Monument as a machine, as a "Bataille Machine" was extraordinarily enriching. It was wonderful to see the exhibition panel on "The Ontological Cinema" that was set up in the library and continued to expand, and to realize that hundreds of people took copies of Marcus's texts with them. This satisfied Marcus's goal. Philosophy confronts reality, immediately and directly. Philosophy acts. Philosophy is necessary. This assertion was given form in the Bataille Monument. Also, the numerous, several-day visits that Marcus took to the housing complex and his confrontation with my work and with art, in its intensity, the severity of the questioning, and also in his life-affirming joy was a beautiful and very stimulating time for me. It was one of the most beautiful things I got out of the monument.

#### 4.g. Webcams

I was not pleased with the webcams, the element that intended to use the Internet to create a link to the world, to the non-visitors. I think Internet exists for the purpose of communication. Aside from any criticism as regards particular content, what I really like about the Internet in all its unspeakable wretchedness are the web cameras and the connected illusion of communication, of creating a feeling of simultaneity at another location. I like this idea, this headless, unreflected idea, of letting someone participate. That is what I wanted to achieve with the web cameras and the website: "www.bataillemonument.de". The form is important insofar as it says everything about the intention. And it was impossible for me to achieve or work out this form for reasons of finances, of Documenta 11 organization, and of artistic, democratic reasons relating to the platform. I want the absolute minimum—pure webcam, pure simultaneous communication. I wanted the 4 images from the 4 webcams to appear immediately when the website was opened; I wanted the screen to be divided into 4 sections like a surveillance camera and then with one click on a camera image it would be possible to look closer into that image. I wanted that to be possible without any text or any legend. I wanted that to be the only option: for people to be able to have a look into the Bataille Monument at the same time from Africa, Asia, America, or wherever.

This was not possible because websites are designed uniformly by graphic designers, including curriculum vitae, project description, a couple photos, links, and maybe a web project. The only way to access the images from the four webcams was through the website, which became merely an illustration. Even worse, it became information instead of impossible communication through a web camera! Regarding other Internet projects (and I think only the web camera project was of any artistic interest precisely because it was not creative), should I have remained true to my intentions and eliminated it entirely? I think this was also the reason why I received the least amount of feedback, critique, or discussion regarding this element of the Bataille Monument. The webcams were supposed to be one element of the Bataille Monument, but they became information about it, in an economical small size. It did not help at all that we were constantly working, with the help of the Documenta 11 technical repair team, to keep all four cameras operating through to the last day.

#### 4.h. Sculpture

The “sculpture” element in the Bataille Monument was intended to isolate the object, the exterior, the visible, that which is generally referred to as a monument (but is in fact only the sculpture of the monument). The sculpture was supposed to be only the sculpture of the monument and not the monument itself. This was often not properly understood, or rather, it was understood in a very superficial and cursory manner. Yet it is precisely the questions that emerged from the misunderstanding that led to discussion about the sculpture. Once it was isolated from the monument, the sculpture took on the function of a meeting place, a playground or rather a romping ground as well as a place to sit, used mostly during the evening hours. The sculpture was a place within the urban space of the housing complex. Many viewers raised questions as to what statement it was making, what it intended to represent. There is no way to avoid this, even though its form developed by chance. Once it was decided that the main goal was to create a sculpture that posed the question of the monument, it no longer mattered what the sculpture looked like! I did not want to copy the human figure or the head as was done for the Spinoza Monument and the Deleuze Monument. I wanted to make a sculptural interpretation that resembled a tree stump, an organic form, without beginning or end. I wanted to make a sculpture in which the organic element would be taken up by a geometric one or in which the geometric element was the pedestal for the organic element and in that way at the same time prevented it from connecting with the truly organic part (the ground). The sculpture of wood, plastic, and cardboard, covered with packing tape survived in good condition for the duration of the exhibition, thanks to the repair team that each day retaped and retouched the places where it was torn or scraped. This repair service was necessary, because without the daily repairs, replacing and reinforcing parts of the sculpture as well as other elements of the Bataille Monument, this project would not have lasted through the entire exhibition period.

#### 5. The confrontation with and through the Bataille Monument

There was a considerable degree of discussion about the Bataille Monument. I was surprised since we had calculated that only about 4–5% of the visitors to the Documenta 11 platform 5 came to the Friedrich-Wöhler housing complex. I think there was so much discussion since this project was complex and problematic, beautiful and difficult. This carried over to the temporary visitors, and questions evolved in a way I had never experienced before. There was much misunderstanding and misinformation that contributed to the discussion. I think the circumstances, that the Bataille Monument was set up as an experience in public space throughout the duration of the exhibition, led to these consequences. Personally, I was constantly busy dealing with my project, which raised many new questions for me. It was very important to be on the ground in the housing complex the whole time. I drew that consequence from my experience with the Deleuze Monument. It is not important to be constantly present for the duration of the exhibition as an artist, communicator, or explainer to the audience; instead, I had to be there on-site as a

superintendent for the housing complex and for the workers. On the one hand, I wanted to offer a sign that I care about my work and I won't leave the complex alone with my work. On the other hand it was necessary to solve all the everyday problems that arose—technical, organizational, and human. So I was there on the site the whole time except for 3-day absences each month (to visit my studio in Paris). I saw this as a noble task. The demand was incredibly high and so often the visitors did not understand that I was not there on site to impart any information or as a teacher, but to take care of electricity, photocopying, tools, etc. I appreciated this confrontation with the everyday reality of such a project. I also think the residents appreciated the fact that I dealt with everything myself although that led to my constant presence, which it what caused the misunderstanding. I was virtually ever-present, not because I am an “approachable artist”, but because I wanted everything to work all the time. Another misunderstanding of my work was the “zoo” discussion. The “zoo” criticism is something that has continually arisen, also in other projects in public space. The criticism assumes that either the visitors to the housing complex find themselves in a zoo, or they feel like zoo tourists (whereby it is assumed that it is the residents that are on display). Or the criticism is that the visitors to the Monument are brought around as if they were on display. I think it is remarkable that obviously (or was it merely unspoken?) the question of who feels as if they are in the zoo was not clearly and definitively answered. Who is on display? Who is the tourist? It is also remarkable, and this is why I reject this “zoo” criticism, because this is a question of sensitivity. It is a matter of the individual sensitivity of the audience! It has to be possible in and with art to confront one's own sensitivity or to disregard it. For me it was very obvious that the “zoo” argument always came from a passive, theoretical perspective, since the Bataille Monument confronted theory with practice. My art was active, it attempted to assert a utopia. It risked accepting responsibility for something it could not be responsible for: the art, the Bataille Monument, trusted in its strength and refused to accept its weaknesses. The Bataille Monument did not want to include anyone in its passivity. That is why I cannot accept any sensitivities, and by the way it is important to note that this was never expressed by the residents or workers. Whenever the “zoo” criticism was expressed, it came from the targetted art audience. This is also why David Hammons's statement is so important. The “zoo” criticism does not seem autonomous to me. It is not free, because if the will to autonomy is absent, the conditions for freedom and responsibility are also lacking. This is not about individual sensitivities. The Bataille Monument project is about responsibility and freedom. The Bataille Monument is free of guilt and conscience. I wanted to overstep bounds with this project. I wanted to act freely with my Own. The Bataille Monument was an assertion: the assertion that an autonomous work of art has to struggle to be able to exist in all situations and in all environments!

## 6. The Friedrich Wöhler Housing Complex

I was often asked how the project was received by the residents of the housing complex. I am certainly the last person who could answer this question! It seems obvious that an answer would involve a value judgment. That would mean that if the project was received well it was a success and if not, then it was a failure. The Bataille Monument project was not a matter of acceptance or rejection. I clearly wanted to work for a nonexclusive audience. This assertion first had to be made and endured before it is possible to discuss any conclusions to be drawn. The Bataille Monument was an experience; it was designed to be an experience but that also means that first the experience has to be made!

I was not bored for a single hour; I was confronted with people who live at the outskirts of a mid-sized German city. In many discussions I especially experienced the incredible strength of questioning through art. In the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex I perceived the importance of art, of philosophy, of poetry; even its necessity as something existential and fundamental. With respect to the Bataille Monument, I noticed tat the tolerance, acceptance, confrontation, and participation grew with each day of the exhibition. This conviction grew stronger in everyday practice in the housing complex; the conviction that art can fight for and assert a space. It is

the conviction that art can create a mental space, that it can penetrate into the brain. I was encouraged by this experience. Towards the end of the exhibition period a question arose that was expressed more and more often by visitors and some individuals involved in the project, but never by the workers. The question referred to the “afterwards,” to what would happen after the project was dismantled. It was connected to the expressed or unspoken accusation that those involved would then fall into a “void.” I always rejected this question, as it seemed to me to demonstrate that the point of the project had been missed entirely. This was because it was only through the strong confrontation and fruitful experience that we had that the social issue of social conscience was even triggered and suddenly brought to the foreground. All of a sudden that which I always considered an art project, a temporary art project (which was also intended to be liberating), was reduced to the social role that we defined for it daily, together with difficulties and setbacks. As the artist I was reduced to the social task, to the social responsibility that we created together through art in the first place. Does that mean that the artist does indeed assume the role of social worker? I continually rejected these attempts to view me as a social worker. I even developed an aversion to social work and social workers. I think only in extreme individual cases (such as Lothar Kannenberg) did they make their commitment and involvement into their career. I resisted the pressure to have to answer the question of “afterwards”. Because I am not cynical! It would have been cynical to say: because a project might cause problems, questions and problematic situations, then I won't even try doing it!

I paid the workers for their assistance, as I briefly mentioned at the start, and I can explain why I think that is so important, and nevertheless the issue of payment, the whole money issue, remains unresolved for me, also with respect to this project. Of course for all workers it was first and foremost a way to earn money with and through the Bataille Monument. There is nothing wrong with that; that is reality. Except for the college and high school students, all other workers were unemployed. The problem and unresolved issue is that as soon as payment is involved, inevitably the working hours and achievement of the coworkers are observed. A “working relationship” develops. This working relationship has nothing to do with my art project. The lack of volunteer labor has the disadvantage that the question of giving (how much effort, how much work will I invest?) is linked to and weighed against the question of taking (how much do I earn; how much profit with I have?). This led to many unproductive, unpleasant situations, such as regarding the division of labor and the distribution of work hours. I was overwhelmed each Monday when new groups were formed and work was divided up. I had to accept these egotistical comparisons among the workers, because I was partly responsible for them. Those were the unpleasant moments of the project. I am aware of the importance and strengths of the Bataille Monument and the fact that it set an example. I am less sure whether, in order to carry through such a project, this requires a headless, unbalanced, and often inconsistent artist (focussing only on the goal) such as myself. Many conflict situations in the housing complex could have been resolved more calmly, with more sensitivity and with less bungling.

## 7. The Media

The Bataille Monument received what I considered a surprising amount of attention from the media. It was a very media-oriented project. I have no complaints about that, though I was also surprised at the superficial and lightweight reporting. The Bataille Monument with all the questions it raised was hardly reflected in its complexity. Both positive and negative reports usually focussed on the social environment, which seemed to be the easiest to explain. I noticed in the reporting and through some discussions with journalists how great the time pressure and sales pressure was with respect to “reader-friendly” writing and topic selection. This is why I also realize that the great media response has nothing to do with the artistic value of the project and a lot to do with its apparent communicability (public space, young people in a housing complex, artist on-site). Of course I did not discover this for the first time regarding this project. It is just that I noticed it again here, and it was stronger this time. I am not complaining because right at the beginning of the

project I decided to accept all requests for interviews and all possible meetings with journalists! Without exception I planned to answer all questions posed by the media and to provide information about the Bataille Monument. I did this for the housing complex, the workers and all the helpers. I assumed that not everyone could come to the Bataille Monument because of time constraints. Therefore I thought it would be important to take advantage of all possible channels of communication to talk about the project. I was well aware that this was a matter of quantity, of media presence, and not refined analyses. I deliberately attempted to weigh this geographical disadvantage and balance it out through media presence. This did happen to a certain extent, with the mentioned shortcomings. In any case this media presence was assessed positively in the housing complex and I tried, as far as I was informed, in turn to tell the workers about the reports. I was often told, “We saw the Bataille Monument on television” or we read about it here or there, or my relatives or friends saw or heard us on television or the radio. This feedback was the result of openness toward the media. But I cannot imagine how the Bataille Monument would have lasted in the housing complex if there was no media coverage, no radio or TV reports, and no articles on it, and if as a result far fewer visitors had come. It was obvious that the extensive media reporting had encouraged many visitors to come to see the Bataille Monument despite the long way and amount of time it took. I think we paid the price of superficiality and repetition in the media analyses in order for the residents and workers to have the greatest possible exchange at the Monument itself.

## 8. Taking down the Monument

I also wanted to be present when the project was taken apart, as a result of the experience I had with the Deleuze Monument. I did not want to leave the residents of the housing complex alone with the job of dismantling the project. What I did not foresee, however, was that it would only take three days to takedown. It took three days for all materials and all parts of the Bataille Monument to be taken down, or rather, torn down. Of course I had prepared the dismantling by arranging for trucks and garbage bins, and I also worked some additional residents into the taking-down schedule who had spoken to me during the exhibition. The only things that were kept and brought back to Paris or put in the Documenta archives in Kassel were the books and the texts and videos that were produced in the course of the exhibition. All hi-fi and video equipment, tools and the vehicles used by the shuttle service were raffled off to the workers, so everyone could take something home with them. I liked this method of distributing the materials without regard to the amount of work or time invested or the earnings of the individual workers, but instead as a matter of chance. I understood the actual process of dismantling or tearing down the project as a ritual. In no time at all, virtually all usable materials—the Plexiglas panes, wooden posts, boards, strings of lights, chairs, lamps—everything that was at all reusable was torn down and put in small storage piles at all the building entrances. Everything was then immediately taken inside by the non-working residents and put in the basement or elsewhere. It all went so fast that I had the impression it was all prepared in advance or was a ritual in which participation in taking away and transferring the materials marked the appropriation or winning back of something. Of course it could also be assumed that many of the families living in the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex were forced by their economic situation to reuse materials and not to let things go to waste. Nevertheless I remember these days as moments of a frenetic practice reclaiming according to unspoken rules. Was the reclaiming of materials a means of reclaiming the space that had been taken up and used and the reclaiming of the housing complex and their values? All of this happened without being directed in any way, and without sadness or aggression. I wanted to leave the space as it was when I first arrived, for the sake of the residents but also for the sake of the Bataille Monument, because I feel that the memories of the residents, visitors and workers, as well as my memories of the joint experience we all had is an essential part of the project, the notion of “monument”. On the last evening, which was then earlier than planned since everything had been dismantled so quickly, I invited everyone who had helped out to one final dinner and noted that the transition back to the realities of daily life took place without nostalgia or

sentimentality, but with friendly feelings. I found this life-affirming and it made me happy.

I am proud of the Friedrich Wöhler housing complex; I am proud of the workers and I am proud of myself. I am proud of the housing complex because they tolerated, used and put up with the project. I am proud of the workers because they supervised this project despite much doubt and many questions and because they helped the project take on a daily existence. And I am proud of myself for having carried it through to the end. The Bataille Monument was the most difficult and trying, most expensive, and most wonderful project I have ever done.

**About the “Musée Précaire Albinet”, about an artists’ work in Public Space, and about the artists’ role in public.**

I am an artist, I am not a social worker. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a work of art, and not a sociocultural project. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is an affirmation. The affirmation that Art, only as Art, can attain a real importance and have a political meaning. The affirmation that artwork can accomplish something only because it is Art. Only Art doesn’t exclude anyone. Only Art has the universal capacity to engage a one to one dialogue. From viewer to artwork and from artwork to viewer. This is why I insist on the fact that the “Musée Précaire Albinet” is an art project. Any other understanding of the “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a misunderstanding or an easy way out. The point is not to reduce art to a sociopolitical field, nor to limit the mission of art to a cultural event. Art is not controllable. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is not controllable and can constantly escape control, at any time. When proposing the project to the inhabitants of the Cité Albinet and Landy area, I said that the “Musée Précaire Albinet” was a mission. A possible mission based on an agreement, but not an impossible mission. An agreement between myself, the artist, and the Cité Albinet, the urban environment itself, the Public Space. If I want to work in Public Space, as an artist, I then must agree with Public Space. In a gallery, museum, private collection or when participating in an exhibition, I don’t necessarily have to agree. But when working in Public Space, to agree is a necessity which makes the work so demanding. Agreeing means to agree with the mission. I must agree constantly and at all times, because only if I agree with my mission in Public Space, can I cooperate. I must cooperate with reality in order to change it. Reality cannot be changed unless you agree with it. As an artist with a project in Public Space, I am compelled to agree with reality. To agree does not mean to approve of. To agree means to dare assert without explaining, without justifying, without discussing, without argumentation, without communicating. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is not arguable, nor is it justifiable. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is an affirmation, in agreement with its neighborhood, its inhabitants, its location, its program, its visitors, and its activities. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is not based on respect, it is based on love. To affirm something does not mean to respect something, to affirm something means to love something. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” claims to be a breakthrough. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” claims to be a concrete manifesto on the artists’ role in public. This project claims to be the utopian realization of a concrete artistic practice. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” holds within itself the violence of transgression. I am not a historian, neither a scientist nor a researcher. I am a warrior. I, myself, must constantly fight the ideology of the possible, the ideology of what is allowed and I must fight the logic of the cultural. I, myself, must constantly fight the good conscience and the ideology of the political-correctness theory. I must constantly encourage myself to take the right decision, and I must encourage myself to remain free and to stick to the affirmation of the “Musée Précaire Albinet”. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a project that does not want to improve, nor soothe, nor tranquilize. With this project, I want to dare touch what cannot be touched, the other. I want to engage dialogue with the other without neutralizing him. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” does not work towards justice or democracy. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” does not want to show what is “possible” or “impossible”. The artists’ freedom and the autonomy of art are not serving a cause. If an artist is told for what purpose he should work, then the work is not art. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a project in complete overwork, in total exaggeration. By its’ very excess and unreason, this project becomes each day a more profound affirmation. It becomes even more demanding for the receiver than for the giver. This project must constantly assert its’ *raison d’être*, and defend its’ autonomy as artwork. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” must continuously be rebuilt and reconceived in my mind and in the minds of the Public Space. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a project full of complexity, contradiction, difficulty and beauty too. It is the short, rare and non-spectacular moments of confrontation of which Art is capable for anyone, anywhere and anytime. I shall never say that the “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a success, nor shall I ever say it is a failure.

Thomas Hirschhorn

## GUIDELINE: PRESENCE AND PRODUCTION

Projects which I call “Presence and Production”-projects want to establish another topic than “Participation”. “Presence and Production” is my term. This new term wants to stand up beside terms as “Participative Art”, “Relational Aesthetic”, Community Art” or “Educational Art” which are not my terms and which I never use. Participation cannot be the goal, participation cannot be an aim, participation can only be a lucky outcome, because I, the artist, have to do the work for the implication of the other.

Therefore in my “Presence and Production”-works I want to assert that - I the artist have to give something first from me (my presence and my production) in order to obligate - yes obligate - the other (the non-exclusive audience) to give something (his/her time and his/her production). I believe that throughout my presence and my production - my production and my presence first - I can create involvement, implication, exchange, dialogue, confrontation, contact!

With my “Presence and Production”-works I want to create moments of public space:

“Bataille Monument” in Friedrich-Wöhler Siedlung, Kassel (2002)

„Musée Précaire Albinet» in Cité Albinet, Aubervilliers (2004)

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» in The Bijlmer, Amsterdam (2009)

“Théâtre Précaire 2» in Cité Gros-Chêne, Rennes (2010)

I want to create moments of public space even within institutions:

“24H Foucault” at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2004)

«Swiss-Swiss Democracy» at Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2005)

## FAITH

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is one of my most demanding, one of my most difficult, one of my most challenging but also – to me – one of my most beautiful works.

It is most demanding in regard to the amount of energy which was given to construct it, to organize and run it daily. It is most difficult in regard to the hyper-complexity and ambition of its structure – the multiple and interwoven beams. It is most challenging in regard to the very specific situation of the work, in this public space, the Bijlmer. And it is most beautiful – to me – in regard to the people of the Bijlmer that I met here. The people of the Bijlmer, in their involvement in my work, in their coexistence towards it, gave «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» its soul, over and over every day again and again but every day differently.

This work fills me with happiness, beyond the fact that it is not yet a granted value for the Bijlmer inhabitants nor a granted value in the art field yet.

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is a real experience, an experience which produced and achieved moments of precarious grace, it gives me the strenght, the pleasure and the will to continue my work. My faith – yes – my faith in Art and my faith in Philosophy as tools to cut holes into the everyday interests of reality, is reinforced.

Thomas Hirschhorn June 28. 2009

## **«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival»**

### **Bijlmer**

«The Bijlmer» is a neighborhood south-east of Amsterdam. Because it is the location for the set up of «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» – this neighborhood is both the place that hosts and the place for which «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is destined. That is why «The Bijlmer» has given its' name.

### **Spinoza**

I am a fan of Spinoza. His book «Ethics» still remains sharp and necessary to fight philosophical obscurantism and idealism. To read Spinoza means: to accept to insist on receptivity and sensuality, without giving up the idea of a certain infinity. To get started in philosophy – Deleuze would say – read Spinoza's «Ethics». I, myself, open this book very often. Spinoza presents a concept without transcendence and without immanence. It is the concept of the «Here and Now» as it was shown by Deleuze. It is the concept of Life, the concept of life of a subject without God. This subject is an active subject, a subject of delight and leisure. It is a responsible subject, joyful and affirmative. I like the fact that I do not understand everything when reading Spinoza, and I like the fact that there is always much more to understand when reading Spinoza.

### **Festival**

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is an artwork, it is a sculpture. The title includes the name Festival so it can states clearly its character of event, its vocation of encounter, its time limitation, its transplantability – first of all in the mind, but then physically – elsewhere, at some other time. I assert that a Festival is also a sculpture and that a Festival can be a sculpture.

### **Presence and Production**

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» follows the Presence and Production 'guidelines'. Which means: my presence (the artists' presence) and my production (the artists' production) first of all, because that's the condition which makes participation become possible for the inhabitants of the Bijlmer neighborhood of Amsterdam. Therefore 'participation' is not the aim of this work, 'participation' can be the consequence of my presence and of my production. I am the one who must give something of myself first, in order to invite the Other (the inhabitant) to give something in turn.

### **The Other**

The question of public, the question of public space, the question of the Other, the question of a 'non-exclusive audience' are – more than ever – set forth. «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is the affirmation that Art must be a tool to create this public space. «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» addresses the Other. The form of this artwork will enable the Other to be included, the form does not want to exclude anyone, that is its will, its break-through, its destiny and its grace.

### **Coexistence and Co-operation**

This project can only be done in Coexistence. Coexistence with the inhabitants of the Bijlmer neighborhood. Coexistence because it is their place, coexistence because it is with them, it is resolutely with and for the Bijlmer inhabitants. It is with and for the local inhabitants first – without exclusion of others.

But it is my work. It is me – the artist – who assumes fully the responsibility, who takes the responsibility for this work, for the entire work, in all of its aspects. The work must consequently be made in co-operation. «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» cannot be done without the help of the inhabitants. This work cannot be done without the help of the inhabitants because it is not me – the artist – who claims to be helping, who wants to 'help' or furthermore who 'knows' how to help – on the contrary – the inhabitants are the ones helping the work. The inhabitants are the ones who are helping «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» to be carried out to completion.

## **Precariousness**

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is a project which is limited in time – for a duration of two months. Precariousness is the dynamics, the emergency, the necessity of this work. All instants are important for the duration of «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival», all instants are a unique instant, all instants are equal in their capacity to reach out.

This is how «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» claims to be universal. This work is not 'site-specific' – this work wants to prove its universality as artwork in the Bijlmer neighbourhood and with its inhabitants. Precariousness is a means of asserting the importance of the moment and of the place, of asserting the Here and Now to touch eternity and universality.

## **Beam**

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» is conceived as a Beam of energy. A Beam – to both concentrate the energy and give multiple openings. Concentrate energy for Spinoza and create multiple energies to become public, to have an impact, to create the public. The expression of this Beam is a very large book («Ethics») built on the lawn between the Kruitberg and Kleiburg buildings, next to the training field of The Parel of the Bijlmer. This Beam – which is «The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» – consist of 16 elements :

1. Daily-Newspaper, 2. "The Bijlmer Documentation-Center", 3. "Spinoza-Car", 4. Bar/Snack, 5. "Spinoza-Library", 6. "Running Events", 7. Internet-Café, 8. "Child's Play", 9. Webcam/Website, 10. "Spinoza-Exhibition", 11. Lectures/Seminars/"Master classes", 12. "Spinoza-Theater", 13. Workshop, 14. "Ambassador", 15. TV/Radio-Connection, 16. "Tank TV"-Connection.

## **Dates**

«The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival» will be set up from April 2<sup>nd</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.

It opens on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009 and lasts until June 28<sup>th</sup> 2009.

The dismantling of the work will take place from June 29<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup> 2009.

## 6 concerns about "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival"

1. The product, shape, construct or the experience of this project should be precisely described and critically published because it is something precise, that's exactly the point. What's precise is my assertion that art - because it's art - has the power of transformation, the power to transform each human being. I do believe this. I rather say believe than think. What's precise is my assertion that art - because it's art - is something autonomous. Autonomy is what gives the artwork its beauty and its absoluteness. What's precise is my assertion that art - because it's art - can provoke a dialogue or a confrontation, from one to one. What's precise is my assertion that art - because it's art - is universal, and to me Universality means: Justice, Equality, the Other, the Truth, the one World. What's precise is the assertion that art - because it's art - can create the conditions of an implication - beyond everything else. And what's precise is the assertion that art - because it's art - is resistance, the resistance to facts, to aesthetical and cultural habits. To me art is - in its resistance - movement, positiveness, intensity and belief. This is what my work is based upon - it's not a theory - it's something I want to work out here. The process of working out my assertions into a form - now - is the artistic work. It is the fieldwork of an artist - of me, artist - here and now.

2. I never made 'relational aesthetic' art, nor ever read the book about it. It's not a problem if I am classified by some lazy and superficial critics as one of those artists, but it's just inaccurate in regard to what I am doing. None of my work in public space ever was a 'relational aesthetic' project, simply because I want to create the relation with the other only if this other is not specifically connected to art. This is and has always been my guideline: to create - through art - a form which implicates the other, the unexpected, the uninterested, the neighbor, the unknown, the stranger. I always wanted to work for this 'non-exclusive' public and it's my most important goal. To address the 'non-exclusive' public means to confront the real, the failure, the non-success, the cruelty of the non-interest, the incommensurability of such a complex situation - I put myself into. But it also means to include the art-lovers, the art-specialists, the art-involved. My work includes them as part of the 'non-exclusive' public but does not target them in particular. I do know - as an artist - that I am always suspected of something (for example of making 'aesthetic relational' art). That's o.k. - I am not complaining - because I have to be the 'usual suspect', but this is also precisely the reason for clarifying what is really 'suspect' and what is just 'usual' ('normal') sovereignty in assuming my role as 'usual suspect' - therefore why "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" deserves to be critically published.

3. What evolves with "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" is friendship. The work is made in and with friendship: The work is made in friendship towards the inhabitants, in a gesture of friendship. This gesture does not even necessarily need to be responded to - since I am doing it - it's both utopian and concrete. What evolves is this gesture of friendship which comes from the friendship between Art and Philosophy. "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" is obviously the celebration of the philosophy of Spinoza - here and now, today - at the Bijlmer. My love for Spinoza is the love for philosophy, for things I do not "understand", the love for the infinitude of thinking. My work is not based on tolerance, respect, compassion or understanding, my work is based on the passion for something. This is utopian but it is concrete at the same time. It's utopian because Spinoza is an issue for no one here and it's concrete because the work is precisely here, at The Bijlmer, because it could have been elsewhere. What evolves as well with "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" - I hope very much so - is the beauty of the precarity of such a work. The precarity of the moment - here and now - the beauty, or the grace, which arises because someone is awake. Because the term 'precarity' is so important to me - I see it as a positive and creative term - I think my work deserves to be precisely discussed - in order to clarify and differentiate 'precarity' in an assumed precarious work of art with the terms of 'ephemeral-art', 'community-art' etc.

4. "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" will not be "just another project" amongst others. Because of its complexity, its irreducibility, its location, its exaggeration, its becoming possible and the extreme situation of solitude. "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" is a hyper-complex and extra-ordinary uncomparable project. I have been preparing this work for over a year and a half and I am now facing the unpredictable, the new, original, immediate and unexpected. Projects such as "Presence and Production" projects are always entirely different - perhaps not for the unconcentrated and rapid visitor - but for me and for the people of the neighborhood involved in it. This energy and this implication become universal - I believe - beyond just a local experience and event. This is why it deserves to be precisely described and documented. Every one of my projects in public space was never "just another project" - I myself do not think in those terms - and could not, because a project like this requires such an amount of courage, mobilization, freedom of spirit, power and energy, that there would be absolutely no chance in succeeding if I considered it as only "another project". My involvement and engagement on site can give evidence of this.

5. I understand that my work needs to be more compelling, but as always, my work has to compell - or try, as an artwork, to be compelling to the other. I myself - as the artist - must refuse to analyse my work before doing it, before experiencing it. This is the difficult point - and I am not trying to avoid it - but you must also understand that the artist needs to do the work first, before (self)-analysing it and that's the crucial act of resistance. This has always been my guideline. I call it acting in "headlessness". I am aware that with "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" as in other works, it could be interpreted as a lack of rigor, but I believe that in order to do the work, it's the price to pay - as an artist - and I am ready to pay for it, first. This is also why I think my work deserves to be critically discussed - for once - on a level which englobes this issue as paradox or problematic. Because I, who am not a theorician nor a 'practician', must

go beyond this argumentation in order to give form coming from me and from me only. I want to do my work in "Low control" - which could also be misunderstood as lack of rigor - but acting in "Low control" means to me refusing "to control", it means put myself at a level of "low control", like someone on ground, at bottom, overwhelmed, completely submerged but still unresigned, unreconciled and (of course) uncynical.

6. When I invite philosophers and art historians (Marcus and Vittoria, Alexandre and Daniel - as "Presences and Producers") but also when I invite (punctually) other philosophers to intervene - I do this in friendship. The focal-point is to share together the friendship towards Art and Philosophy, to understand "The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" as an artwork which asserts this friendship and produces friendship. My goal is not to make a 'cultural event' and I have already - I think - worked out how to avoid it, (location, time, information modes, etc.). Therefore, in order to specifically work-out the difference between a cultural project and my artwork, my work deserves to be described critically and precisely and to be published in the form of a book.

Thomas Hirschhorn, 2009

## Toward 'Precarious Theater'

Now – after my "Spinoza-Theater" experience – I understand why, before performing, actresses and actors in France say "merde" to encourage each other.

I consider the "Spinoza-Theater" that I integrated in the "Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" and directed, a disaster. It is a disaster concerning what one would call the staging, it is a disaster on a human level, it is a disaster in terms of technique and material questions, lastly it is a disaster in terms of acting. But it is not an artistic disaster because I have done it, we are performing every day and I am learning a tremendous amount from it. I exposed myself to an incredibly big challenge without foreseeing or measuring the difficulties.

Very soon I realized that I would not succeed in doing the "Spinoza-Theater" as I had first planned, too tired as I was – after a full day's work on the construction of the "Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival" – to be concentrated, awake and present, lucid enough to engage in such a demanding task as this one.

I thought – headless – that the actresses and actors, which are all inhabitants of the Bijlmer, should know their lines by heart, but it was not the case and some of them won't know them – ever. So I finally had to accept the fact that sheets of paper would always be there on stage with of course, the consequence of a relative immobility of the actors obliged to read their lines. That's how the use of microphones – which were necessary for me since the "Spinoza-Theater" was to be performed outdoors with the surrounding noise of children playing, cars, subway, people talking at the food-bar – imposed itself as the condition to read and speak out the text while also being a fixed point in space.

To be clear and without self-indulgence – I am really a bad theater director – but, facing this unavoidable fact and although I am astonished by the disaster and my incapacity to avoid it, the "Spinoza-Theater" makes me happy – yes, happy.

What makes me happy is that despite my complete insufficiency, despite the extremely difficult conditions, I fulfilled the mission I set myself to perform every day and maintain this mission and stick to it at whatever cost.

What makes me happy is to have kept my engagement and my truthfulness toward the beautiful and new text of Marcus Steinweg, which, through daily performance, is gradually entering people's minds word by word, sentence by sentence, assertion by assertion.

What makes me happy is to have stood up to the actresses and actors of the neighborhood, who resisted with force and made me pay a high price for my lack of preparation and savoir faire with 'people'. But that's how a conflict rapport was established – which I believe is healthy – since it comes from the permanent frustration that an actor cannot do what I, myself, cannot do either.

What makes me happy is that I maintained the equalitarian (everyone in the play is of same importance) and totalitarian direction (no discussion) which I imposed upon my actors.

What makes me happy is that, out of aggravation, I finally found a way to do the "Spinoza-Theater" with the lack of discipline (to come and perform every day) of my actors which turned out to be completely coherent with my position versus the neighborhood here: I cannot do it alone, I need support, and it happened sometimes that the "Spinoza-Theater" was performed by only 3, 2 or even one single actor, but never was I left helpless and alone.

What makes me happy is that, without control, out of urgency and precipitation, completely overwhelmed in doing something impossible, we achieved within every performance, some very short, rare and furtive moments which had beauty, precariousness and grace. For these very few and exceptional moments it was worth going through such a disastrous experience.

What makes me happy is to have found a sort of cease-fire between my hopes and demands, my inability and self-limits, to have taken responsibility for this huge gap and by assuming this gap to think ahead toward future projects. This cease-fire gives me the impulse to start defining what performing theater integrated in a work of art should be. Doing the "Spinoza-Theater" – even in its disastrous outcome – has made me, during these three months in Amsterdam, develop and imagine new possibilities for future work which I want to call "Precarious Theater".

"Precarious Theater" is never a play, it's a piece of art always integrated within a whole work. Following this precept, the stage-set, the decor, the accessories and the space for the audience of "Precarious Theater" are always elements of an entire work. "Precarious Theater" is happening in the unstable instant and the precariousness of the moment. "Precarious Theater" is made of the extreme difficulty of doing things. "Precarious Theater" is made in 'low control'.

The guidelines for making "Precarious Theater" follow definitions and conditions.

The definitions of "Precarious Theater" are:

- 1) use only new texts written specifically for the occasion (no classics, no repertoire, no references)
- 2) use text as blind text
- 3) performances take place in one spot during a set period of time, a "Precarious Theater" piece cannot be played without the artwork to which it is integrated.
- 4) actors must memorize and know their lines
- 5) no rehearsals. "Precarious Theater" starts directly with the first performance

The conditions of "Precarious Theater" are:

- 1) "Precarious Theater" must be performed daily
- 2) at least one actor (person) says nothing
- 3) there is a short briefing and de-briefing with the actors before and after every performance.
- 4) there are no costumes, no light effects and no sound effects
- 5) microphones are used as fixed points in space for speech.

Thomas Hirschhorn  
Amsterdam 18. June 2009

## **Friendship = Unshared Responsibility**

(Excerpt from the text: «Why 'Where Do I Stand?' and Why 'What Do I Want?」»)

I don't need philosophy to make art, I don't need philosophy to legitimize my work as an artist, and I don't need philosophy to inspire me. I need philosophy as a human being, as a man; I need philosophy in my life. This is why philosophy is only conceivable to me as friendship, as a movement parallel to art, a friendly movement in the same direction. I think that philosophy—like art—can create the preconditions for a grappling or a dialogue with the other, one-to-one. And so—together with Marcus Steinweg—I made the “Map of Friendship between Art and Philosophy,” among other things. We want to give form to the friendship between art and philosophy; we want to commit ourselves. The “logo” of this plan is a handshake. In a handshake, two same hands (two right hands) clasp each other. I can't shake hands with myself; I need the other—the same—the other right hand to complete a handshake. That is the symbol—“logo”—of friendship; that is the symbol of friendship between art and philosophy. Both are needed in order to create something new and unique—a handshake. There is no bottom and there is no top, there is no before and no after, and there is no pure theory and no pure praxis. All there is, is the dynamic that seeks to go beyond theory and beyond practice simultaneously. That's what's implied in the handshake. It is the symbol of agreement. That is the symbol, that is our plan.

WC<sub>FU</sub>

# CONVER- SATION

Thomas  
Hirschhorn

Artist

Jacques  
Rancière

Philosopher

PRESUPPOSITION OF THE EQUALITY OF INTELLIGENCES  
AND LOVE OF THE INFINITUDE OF THOUGHT

Electronic conversation held from  
December 2009 to February 2010

Translated by  
Nicholas Elliott

Dear Jacques Rancière,

I am happy to have the opportunity to write you. I'd like to suggest that I begin our exchange by sharing with you some experiences I had during *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*, my latest work in the public space, conceived for and with the inhabitants of an outlying neighbourhood of Amsterdam in 2009.

I thought that sharing an experience, an experience I had thanks to my work, was a good starting point. *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* is a work of art conceived according to the "Presence and Production" guideline: my presence and production as an artist, but also that of Vittoria Martini, as an ambassador, that of Marcus Steinweg, as a philosopher, and that of Alexandre Costanzo, as an editor.

"Presence and Production" is my own term, a guideline I created to define those of my works that require my presence and production during the entire duration of an exhibition. With this term "Presence and Production," I want to put forward my own notions because I think I can assess what is involved in being responsible for "Presence" and "Production." I can understand what it will require of me. However, I do not know what "community Art," "participative Art," "educational Art," and "relational aesthetics Art" mean. With the "Presence and Production" guideline, my aim is to answer the following questions: can a work-through the notion of "Presence," my own presence—create for others the conditions for being present? And can my work-through the notion of "Production"—create the conditions for other productions to be established?

Over the three months of *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*, I noticed something that was new, unexpected, and surprising to me: the first local inhabitants to come to *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* were inhabitants of the margins, on the margins of the neighbourhood and undoubtedly of society. From the beginning, these inhabitants visited my work regularly and soon came every day. Of all the visitors, these were the ones who stayed the longest. As the first from the neighbourhood, they really involved themselves, yet they were all people on the margins.

Over time, they formed a kind of "hard core" of *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*. Most of these people were isolated and did not know each other before the festival—or if so, barely. They often lived alone, had family issues, problems with work or were unemployed or disabled or had an awful lot of problems.

Their presence—which was lively and often funny—made me happy at once. I was simply happy because there was "Presence." These first inhabitants to confront my work were not the family people, employees, workers, and members of associations, those who are generally "active." On the contrary, they were those who are generally "inactive." I had hoped and worked for a few people in the Bijlmer neighbourhood to share their time with me, but I had not anticipated it would be these inhabitants!

With time, I understood why they were the first—the pioneers—to get involved with and in my work. They all had something: free time, "too much time," and thus time to kill. I was moved by this realisation—for I became aware that my "Presence and Production" guideline had provoked something and that from hereon out we would share this thing: time passing. These first inhabitants had time, lots of free time to come into contact with my work. And I, present all day throughout the exhibition, had time to come into contact with them. I asked myself the question: could it be because I am also on the margins? Don't I have to be, as an artist? Will I ever have to stop being on the margins?

Being on the margins was what we had in common, what we could share, and also understand—understand thanks to art. I felt there was an equality between these inhabitants with too much time and me and my precarious project. The fact that we were present on site was the thing to be shared, it was our "common good." With its "Presence and Production" guideline, *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* offered a focus point. It was a powerful experience for me that those who first took hold of it were those who do not have moments and spaces to enjoy in their daily lives. Was *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* able to create a space, a time and a moment of public space thanks to the presence of the work itself but also that of all the participants—including me? A new space in which "excess time" could crystallise and take shape?

The "Presence and Production" guideline allowed me to understand the relationship to the margins as a common good constituting an exchange. And what if this connection with the margins and the precarious opening that results was the key to coming into contact with the other? Is this precarious relationship dense enough to create a real event?

The notion of "Presence and Production," which I intended as a challenge, a "warlike" affirmation but also a gift—an offensive and even aggressive gift—has taken on a new meaning for me. The formula "Presence and Production" has taken on the dimension of a different and specific power. I thought I had an experience that means something to me, isn't that the experience of art?

Thomas Hirschhorn

Dear Thomas Hirschhorn,

Sadly, I wasn't able to participate in the experience of *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival*. I am sorry for that. I will therefore try to answer based on what you tell me, on what I know of your previous work and on my own concerns. The first thing I hear in "Presence and Production" is the sign of equality represented by "and." Equality between two modes of presence that are commonly opposed: the presence of the work of art as a result of the artist's work, offered to viewers, and the presence of the artist as bearer or initiator of an action. Relational art has claimed to substitute the creation of relationships implying an interaction for the presence of the work of art before the viewer. Activist art claimed to demystify the myth of the artist by advocating an art that has become action. For my part, I've always argued that under the guise of demystification these strategies merely radicalised the traditional figure of the artist by avoiding him the task of relinquishing a product of his work, of separating it from his relationship to himself, to give it over to the examination but also to the temporality of others. There is no art without a production which we give the viewer the means to approach and appropriate within a temporality other than the artist's. "Presence and Production" would then mean two things at once: that the artist exposes himself to being objectified as a producer whose productions are judged by all, but also that the artist is there, not being the work of art himself, but answering for what he has done and answering to those who react to his apparatus by adopting their time.

This means, I think, that the artist's presence is not that of an entertainer. This point probably needs to be clarified. If I understand correctly, this festival had in common with events you've organised in the past under other names (monument, precarious museum, "24 hours") the joining of a work of visual art with a series of activities ranging from philosophy conferences and open reading areas to theater and creative activities for local children. How exactly would you define the difference between this apparatus and those for debates, publications, workshops, and various activities put in place by biennales and other events of the same type or even simply by museums for exhibitions? Is it the very fact that in your case there is not the usual separation between artistic production and a series of actions

intended to make its meaning resonate or to create media impact among the general public? Is that also what "Presence" means, given that what you do is something other than creating a public venue or organising interactions?

The first element of an answer to this question of presence comes in terms of time: the equality "Presence and Production" would also be a sign of equality placed between heterogeneous times. This has no direct relationship, but I'm reminded of what Pedro Costa says about his work as a filmmaker, shooting in "Vanda's room" over two years, going every day, the way you'd go to the office, to see these "margin-dwellers" whose time is more than fluctuant. Many artists and various types of activists want to make people "active" by identifying activity with mobility. They want to make them move off the seat they're sitting on, force them to talk when they feel like watching, listening, or keeping quiet. This view of the meaning of activity is far too simple. Let's not forget that those we once referred to as "active citizens" and "men of leisure" were one and the same while "passive" citizens were those whose time was occupied by manual activities. Privilege can be expressed by opposite qualities—activity or idleness—but its core is the disposal of time. The artist's approach to equality is thus the ability to adapt his time to the time of those who do not "possess" time, those whose fate is always to have too much or not enough time.

"Too much" or "not enough" time determines the politics of art. In the past, when we worked to bring art closer to the people, we wanted to bring it closer to those whose work did not leave them enough time: not enough time to live within art, not enough time to travel far enough to get to know it. This entailed a certain economy to concentrate the art-effect. With the Bijlmer experience, you point out an opposite phenomenon: those who were involved in the experience are those who have too much time, those whose time is not taken up by work. Should we call them margin-dwellers and imagine a community between the artist and them as a shared position on the margins? I don't like this notion much, both because it threatens to raise certain stereotypes of the artist and to simplify the relationship of the work to its absence, of occupied time with idle time. The general phenomenon revealed by these kinds of experiences is the presence of powerful investments for knowledge, thought, art, and any experience of this type in places where they aren't expected, among individuals whose business they aren't supposed to be. It has often been noted that the presence of time made available by force helps: prison provides more time to think and learn than the factory or the office; being in psychiatric institutions has provided a certain number of people with the time to explore their dramatic possibilities etc. But more generally, it is the porosity of the dividing line, the fact of circulating between occupied time and idle time that defines a type of experience that was largely present in yesterday's proletarian world but has been made more perceptible by all the current forms of precariousness and intermittence. The "Presence" of the artist accompanying his "production" would therefore be a manner of adopting

this fluctuating temporality by confronting both his own work with other experiences of work and his available time with other available times. Making different times equal is in fact the condition for a public space, that is to say a space affirming anybody's ability to see, produce, and think, to be created. The political power of art, rather than being in teaching, demonstrating, provoking, or mobilising, is in its ability to create public spaces thus conceived.

Jacques Rancière

Dear Jacques Rancière,

Thank you very much for your answer, which raises four points to which I'd like to respond: the question of the artist as an entertainer, the difference between my work and a cultural event, the question of "participative art" in general and finally the question concerning the position of the margin and the stereotypes of the artist. Yes, the artist's presence cannot be that of an entertainer. The artist is not present because he is an artist (the creator of a body of work)—he is present because the most important thing is to be present. And he is present because he is responsible for everything, he is the concierge and the usher, the cleaning staff, the guarantor of his work: he is there to settle everything, to resolve everything. The artist is responsible for everything and even for what he cannot control or predict: this is why he must be present. I must be responsible for that for which I am not responsible. This is the noble task of my work and my presence. The artist is present to give of his time, the artist shares his time, the artist is present because there is nothing more important to do. The artist has nothing else—nothing more important—to do elsewhere. I was present beside my work for over three months in the Bijlmer neighbourhood, night and day without a break, because this was where the important thing for me was taking place, there was nothing more important to do anywhere else. That is the commitment and the sense of my presence. Presence is also an act of solitude, for I must be able to be alone, due to the complexity of my project, its irreducibility, its placement, its exaggeration, and its possible becoming. It is only by being alone that I can really be present and not make "just another project": personally, I don't think in these terms—I couldn't—for a project like *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* requires such a high level of commitment, of open-mindedness, of strength, and energy, that it would never have come to fruition if I had considered it as "just another project."

The difference between a cultural event and *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* is not in production, the thing produced, whether it is a reading, a seminar, or a workshop.

The fundamental difference is the autonomy of the work that affirms itself and the audience it addresses. I'm interested in this exactness: the simultaneous affirmation of the Autonomy and the universality of the work and the "non-exclusive" audience for which the production of the work is intended. It is not a production specifically adapted to a different audience, it is a production for a "non-exclusive audience." According to me, this means that the production must be able to address an uninterested audience. That the production is not there to satisfy a demand, that it is not trying to find "its" audience and that it is not trying to be a success in terms of the size of the audience or a specific audience. The production—without any concessions—remains an affirmation and something autonomous. Insisting upon that is what makes the difference. The more I insist upon it, the more exact it is. For it must also be possible to make this production without an audience, which was the case during some days of *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* nobody was there! This is possible when the production is based on love. The work is done with the inhabitants, in a gesture of love. Therefore, this gesture doesn't necessarily call for an answer—since it comes from me—this is both utopian and concrete. I want to create a new form, based on love for a "non-exclusive audience." And the form itself is the difference and the act that distinguishes it from a cultural event. My love for Spinoza is the love of philosophy, of things I don't understand, the love of the infinitude of thought. It is a question of sharing this, of affirming it, defending it, and giving it shape.

I agree with you that it is not a question of getting people to "move." I have never used the term of "participative art" in referring to my work—that is a meaningless term, because someone looking at an Ingres painting, for instance, is participating. He can participate without anyone noticing. Similarly, I never used the terms "educational art" and "community art." And my work has never had anything to do with "relational aesthetics." Nor have I read the book about it. If certain superficial critics put me in this category of "relational aesthetics," it is simply an inaccurate representation of what I do. Not a single one of my works in public space has been a project of "relational aesthetics" for the simple reason that I want to create a relationship with the Other only if that Other has no specific relationship with aesthetics. This is—and has always been—my guideline: to create a form that involves the other, the unexpected, the uninterested, those who don't see any interest in it, that involves a neighbour, a stranger, an alien. I have always wanted to work for this "non-exclusive" audience, it is one of my most important goals. To address yourself to a "non-exclusive" audience means to face the real, failure, lack of success, the cruelty of disinterest, and the incommensurability of a complex situation. But it also includes those who love art, the specialists, and those for whom art is important. My work includes them as part of that "non-exclusive" audience, without specifically targeting them. I know that as an artist I am always suspected (of making "relational aesthetics," for instance). That's fine with me—I'm not complaining—for I must be the "usual suspect," but that is precisely

why what is truly "suspect" must be clarified. What is "suspect" is to reign supreme in my role as the "usual suspect." This is why I want to try to define my work with my own notions, like "Presence and Production" and "non-exclusive audience." I am conscious that these notions are not perfect, ideal, or even accurate, but how can you accurately define art work in a single word? These notions are not concepts, they are tools I invented for myself and that I built myself.

The notion "marginal" is not accurate or exact either, I admit, and its use can be stereotyped and also sterile. Therefore I don't want to exploit it, manipulate it, or turn it into politics. I want to be more precise and clearer. I hadn't found an appropriate term to explain my experience at *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* to you and it's true that we need to look more closely into this question and position regarding the margin. Moved by the experience I was having, I tried to give a name to something that I was thinking and grasping, and with which I was in agreement. But the difficulty for me is to give a name to an experience—if it is a real experience, something new—to understand it and speak of this thing that is new. This thing was coexistence. I want to be more rigorous in describing my experience. As rigorous as my work is—I hope. The difficulty is that as an artist, I must refuse to analyse my work before achieving it and experimenting with it. This is where the problem lies—and I'm not trying to avoid it—but you must understand that the artist must first do the work before he analyses it. This has always been my guideline: do first, analyse after. I call it acting "headless." I'm conscious that with *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* or other projects acting "headless" can be interpreted as a lack of rigour, but I think that it is the price to pay—as an artist—to do the work "headless." This is also why I believe my work deserves to be discussed in a critical manner, at a level that would include—for once—these questions in their paradoxical and problematic dimension. For I, who am neither theorist nor "practitioner," must go beyond argumentation in order to be able to create a form, a form that comes from me and only from me. I want to make my work in "low control." Acting in "low control" means to refuse to control, to put myself at a level of "low control" like someone on the ground, at the end of his rope, overwhelmed, totally out of his depth yet not resigned, not reconciled, and not cynical.

Thomas Hirschhorn

Dear Thomas Hirschhorn,

Since we have limited space, I won't ask you any new questions, which would remain unanswered. I just want to point out what strikes me in your answer, in order to open the way to other reflections. First of all, the term "responsibility."

It seems to me that this term was already at the heart of the experience of the *Musée Précaire Albinet*. The Musée was placed under the responsibility—also day and night—of neighbourhood youth, who had to fill every function, both practical and intellectual, required by a museum. This amounted to scrambling the usual relationship between activity and passivity, which is always conceived as the reversal of symmetrical positions. And perhaps we have here a more interesting interpretation of “everyone is an artist” than that which puts a paintbrush in the viewer’s hand or tries to bring the spectator on stage. Sharing, that is to say re-sharing, touching upon the normal distribution of spaces and times is something other than reversing. And of course the artist isn’t a good soul, he is first someone who produces, and this production does not allow itself to be dissolved in the simple creation of a relationship with others. I am struck by the fact that you insist so strongly both on the autonomy of production and the taking into account of an Other who goes beyond any system prepared to receive him. It strikes me because it also leads me to think about my own presuppositions. I have always adhered to Flaubert’s requirement that the author withdraw from his work. Where it was customary to denounce an omniscient position and an aristocratic negation of the other, I always saw, on the contrary, the condition for an emancipation of the reader and the spectator, to whom the author abandons his work, by giving him the freedom and the responsibility to appropriate in his own way a work that no longer belongs to the one who made it. “Absence” then seemed the appropriate complement to “production.” Your watchword calls this pattern into question. It links production with the risk of the presence that verifies the effects while these have never been the object of any calculation. It links production and presence beyond the usual figures of generosity that exiles itself from art venues to reach the “non-audience” or beyond a sacrificial exposure to the cruelty of the one to whom we come, powerless. It may seem contradictory to create a form that involves an Other while affirming one’s own production, without concession, without the need for a response. The answer might be that the two terms imply the presence of a third party that includes both of them and takes them beyond themselves. A Spinoza Festival, a Deleuze Monument, Twenty-Four Hours for Foucault: this means bringing into a contained time and space a power of thought, a power of community in which both the artist’s absolutely determined, absolutely autonomous proposition and the unpredictable participation of a “non-exclusive audience,” an audience without specificity, can be included. The autonomous and the non-exclusive then both appear as two forms of universality that are linked not in the dual relationship of the encounter but because the proposition itself is already permeated by this power of universality and otherness that I call “presupposition of the equality of intelligences” and which you refer to as the “love of the infinitude of thought.”

Jacques Rancière

## STATEMENT : « Monuments »

I try to make a new kind of monument. A precarious monument. A monument for a limited time. I make monuments for philosophers because they have something to say today. Philosophy can give the courage to think, the pleasure to reflect. I like the strong meaning in philosophical writings and the questions about human existence. I like full-time thinking. I like philosophy, even when I don't understand a third of its reflections. I'm interested in non-moralist, logical, political thinking. I'm interested in ethical questions. That's why I chose philosophers for monuments. But in contrast to the altars which are personal commitments, these monuments are conceived as community commitments. There is something really beautiful in the fact that humans beings have the capacity to think, to reflect, and the ability to make their brains work. Spinoza, Deleuze, [greg.org](http://greg.org) and Bataille are examples of thinkers who instill confidence in the reflective capacities: they give force to think, they give force to be active. I think that to read their books continues to make sense, to question, to reflect, to keep beauty vital. The monuments are composed of two parts or even more. The « classical-part », a form, reproducing the thinker with his features, head or body. This part of the monument is a statue. And there is the « information-part », a new part in the monument, the material to be consulted : books, video tapes, statements, biographical documents. This « information-part » with its material responds to « why ». The « classical » statue part responds to « who ». The information part of the monument is a physical place, a small construction (like in the kiosk project) open 24 hours, 7 days a week, where one can isolate oneself, sit down, study and get information about the philosopher's work. This part of the monument with the documentation is a proposition to make the philosopher's work accessible to the public : to those who have never been in contact with philosophy, but also to those who are « professionals », specialists, philosophers or amateurs. I want both aspects of the monument to be equally accessible.

I want to make it possible to first be in contact with information, to read about the work, the philosophy, and then afterwards to look at the statue. I want the monument to be diversely accessible. Thus, the monument is not just standing there, but wants to offer the possibility to be informed – about its' meaning and furthermore about the thinking of those philosophers. There is an active part and a passive part. This monument will not intimidate. It does not come from above. It is made through admiration, it comes from below. The monument will not remain there for eternity. The plastic aspect of the monument – cardboard, wood, tape, garbage bag covering, neon lights – shows its' limitation in time and enforces its' precariousness. The form conveys the idea that the monument will disappear. What shall remain are the thoughts and reflections. What will stay is the activity of reflection.

The four monuments are to Spinoza, Deleuze, [greg.org](http://greg.org) and Bataille. I made the « Spinoza-Monument » in a street of the Red Light district in Amsterdam in 1999; I built the « Deleuze-Monument » in a public housing space, Cité Champfleury Avignon in spring 2000; and I made the « Bataille Monument » in the Friedrich Wöhler Siedlung for the Documenta 11 in Kassel, in 2002.

T.H. February 2003